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ABSTRACT

Small colleges and universities are increasingly feeling the pressure to conduct, present, and publish research. While small college/university faculty face added hurdles, one means for developing more active research programs and for stimulating and encouraging increased scholarship involves collaborating with undergraduate students. St. Norbert College in Wisconsin encourages and supports student-faculty scholarship through a Student-Faculty Endowment Fund, offers students work-study opportunities as research assistants, provides a number of internal internships, and holds an annual research forum in association with the national communication honor society Lambda Pi Eta. Additional institutional strategies that might encourage such research include: requiring students to complete junior or senior theses; forming undergraduate research teams; and offering course credit for research participation. While there are limitations to each of the various strategies for encouraging undergraduate scholarship, finding and developing such strategies can make everyone a winner. (RS)

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Encouraging Undergraduate Scholarship: Institutional Strategies

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Small college/university faculty are increasingly feeling the pressure to conduct, present and publish research (Buzza, 1989). While small college/university faculty face added hurdles, one means for developing more active research programs and stimulating and encouraging increased scholarship involves collaborating with undergraduate students. Not only does the collaboration develop exciting partnerships in learning, but also helps identify and prepare undergraduate students for future graduate school. To encourage student-faculty collaborative research, various institutional strategies may be considered.

Student Faculty Grants

Recently at St. Norbert College a Student-Faculty Endowment Fund has been established that is designed to encourage and support student-faculty scholarship, and also includes artistic projects and teaching-learning enhancement projects. As a class project a recent graduating class contributed $26,000. The Olin Foundation contributed another $100,000. The monies are held in an endowment fund the interest on which is used for funding collaborative grants. The first year the endowment allowed only one $1000 grant; the second year six grants were available, which has grown to seven grants in the current year.

A specially constructed committee of faculty and students reviews the submitted proposals written by the student-faculty research teams. This program has been quite successful for encouraging student-faculty collaboration. Each year there have been more proposals than funding (3 the first year, 9 in year two, and 12 in the past year), which has caused the selection process to become much more competitive. Obviously if more money was available, more grants could be funded to support collaborative scholarship. Ideally, money would be available to fund all worthy proposals.

Stipends and Scholarships for Research

Assign students to faculty as work-study students. Recently at St. Norbert College another new program was initiated whereby each freshman who wanted was guaranteed work-study money. One of the activities that is used to provide students with work-study financial support is to assign students as research assistants. Faculty request assistants and provide qualifications which would be preferred of the assignees.

Buzza (1990: 4) describes a similar program that involves making the assignments for summer research activities. "During the summer they receive board and room as well as a stipend, for up to several months of full-time work depending on the specific needs of the project and the faculty researcher." Students could apply, undergo preliminary screening, be interviewed, and final selection and assignments made so as to provide the best match between the student and the researcher. In this type of program students would engage in more mundane aspects of research (coding, entering data, etc.), but they could be

offered insights into the research process or receive additional responsibilities that might ultimately result in collaboration.

Internal Internships

Today many educational institutions have fully developed internship programs. Typically these programs involve students engaging in work activities in surrounding organizations, many of which are not paid positions. At St. Norbert College the internships are coordinated by the Career Services Center. However, instead of placing students outside the educational institution, the internships could be developed with faculty as research assistants. Intern/researcher assignments could occur, in a similar fashion as assignments for stipend/scholarships, which includes having the student intern apply, undergo preliminary screening, be interviewed, and receive final selection. Again the goal is to provide the best match between the student intern and the researcher.

There is a survey center at St. Norbert College that has a number of internships. The students are involved with a statewide public opinion survey, as well as other privately contracted surveys. The interns are involved in all aspects of survey projects including sampling, assisting in questionnaire construction, pretesting questionnaires, training and supervising interviewers, organizing mail surveys, conducting analyses and writing summary results for the The Wisconsin Survey Report.

Lambda Pi Eta

Constructing chapters of Lambda Pi Eta, the national communication honor society, may be another institutional strategy to encourage undergraduate scholarship. The undergraduate students are at least sophomores with not less than three Communication courses, who have a minimum overall G.P.A. of 3.0, and a minimum G.P.A. of 3.25 in their Communication courses. The students that are eligible and join the organization may be the most interested and most qualified undergraduates to engage in research.

Research teams could be established from the membership that may focus on topics of special interest. The faculty advisor could collaborate with the research team, or another departmental faculty member with matching research interests could collaborate with the team.

A research forum could serve as an impetus for research activity either for collaborative research or individual student research. Recently the chapter at St. Norbert College initiated a Spring research forum where students present papers either from classes or designed specifically for the panel. The programs are modeled after SCA programs; students serve as program chairs and faculty serve as respondents.

Junior/Senior Theses

Buzza (1990) describes an institutional program at the College of Wooster that requires all students to fulfill a college-wide graduation requirement of a year-long senior "independent study" (called "senior IS"). The students select

from a brochure which informs students of faculty research interests. During the students' junior year students complete a semester-long independent study ("junior IS") in preparation for their senior projects, although the exact nature of the "IS" varies from department to department. It seems that while some departments develop semester long projects, others conduct a departmental research methods class for all junior majors. The College of Wooster Communication Department favored the research methods course for their junior majors and used the research methods class prior to a senior thesis for enabling the students to appreciate and conduct better research activity. The course divided into research teams, each employing a different methodology, and was required to complete a "simple" research study, produce a written "article," and present its findings. Buzza (1990) also suggests variations to consider with the research methods course: (1) the entire class engages in a single project that is directed by the instructor, which may result in publication, and (2) students engage in individual projects, which requires a great deal of instructor time. Finally, Buzza (1990) suggests developing an in-house research journal to publish the research reports.

A junior or senior thesis, whether as a year-long, semester, or between semester colloquy, could help stimulate individual or collaborative research.

Major Research Teams

Miller (1979) describes a research team concept that is applied specifically to graduate students at Michigan State University. However, it seems likely that a similar approach could be applied to undergraduate students. Communication departments could receive a list of students at the time they declare their major. During an orientation to the new majors, faculty could describe either their research agenda for the upcoming year, or discuss more generally their research interests. Based upon the orientation students could submit requests through a research coordinator or the departmental office. Miller (1979) and Stacks and Chalfa (1981) mention financial support for total participation in a research team; if financial resources are available the undergraduates that participate could receive some financial support. Within the "research teams" model, students could gain seniority as they head for graduation. First year team members might work on more mundane activities, while upper level undergraduates could be more involved in finished products or serve as a coordinator for research activities. All students' performance would be evaluated at the end of each term.

Course Credit

Stacks and Chalfa (1981) apply a similar research team perspective for undergraduates that involves not only stipends for research participation but also involves course credit. The University of South Alabama program begins by having students enroll in an accredited workshop which is a two-credit, graded course (the authors note expecting the graded component to change to a satisfactory/unsatisfactory course). Students are then assigned to a specific team and to a participating faculty member. However, all students involved in research teams remain involved in the workshop component of the program, which includes various types

of general workshop team activities and discussions of individual projects. Evaluation of research team activities are conducted by each individual research team faculty member, by the workshop director and by student peer appraisal.

Discussion

There are some obvious limitations to each of the various institutional strategies for encouraging undergraduate scholarship. The student faculty grants, research stipends and scholarships require that the institution commit financial resources or commit resources to secure financial support from one or more outside agencies through creative grant writing. As mentioned earlier the Olin Foundation was one agency supportive of faculty-student collaboration.

The suggestions pertaining to Lambda Pi Eta and internal internships probably require the least amount of institutional support. Instituting a chapter of Lambda Pi Eta is not very difficult process, but may hold potential for encouraging undergraduate scholarship--individually or collaboratively. Developing internal internships doesn't require much commitment and administering such a program could probably be subsumed by departments (e.g., Career Services, etc.) already existent within the college or university.

Miller (1979) proposes two conditions for the research teams concept to be successful, which also seem applicable for undergraduate research teams. First, there must be a commitment by all faculty to engage in research. There is likely to be charges of inequity if some students are assigned to research teams that do not meet or do not accomplish anything. Second, the faculty research interests must lend itself to collaborative research. Some research activity may not fit a team concept. Also, there may be difficulties supervising if there are so many majors in a department that require many teams to be established.

Both the course credit/workshop and the junior/senior theses suggestions may share the workload problems associated with many majors and/or projects. Large amounts of supervisory demands may require corresponding release time, which requires additional resources in the form of increasing faculty positions. A creative strategy may include bringing qualified administrators into (or back into) the classroom on a part-time basis to help cover teaching needs.

Indeed, there must be student, faculty and institutional commitment for encouraging undergraduate scholarship, but as Zahorski (1991: 1) argues there are numerous potential benefits:

> Students benefit in many ways. To begin with, they are given an opportunity to experience learning in its purest and most exhilarating form as they work with their instructors from beginning to end on academic projects. In addition, their work on such projects enhance their credentials, thus helping them realize their career and graduate school goals. Perhaps most importantly, such learning partnerships help students

build confidence and self esteem.

> Faculty benefits will be equally great. Like their student partners, faculty will learn a great deal from these enterprises, especially because they will be given a splendid opportunity to see things from a fresh perspective of their student collaborators...it [will be] possible for faculty to undertake projects previously put on the back burner because of a lack of requisite resources.

Finding and developing institutional strategies for encouraging undergraduate scholarship can make everyone a winner--students, faculty and educational institutions.

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